



Department of Labor

402 West Washington
Room W195
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Fax: (317) 233-3790

Contact: Tim Crouse
Phone: (317) 232-1987

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As Summer Heats Up, So Do Workers

Indianapolis, IN – As Mother Nature turns up the heat in Indiana, the Indiana Department of Labor wants to remind employers and employees to be cautious when working in hot environments. For workers, the onset of summer heat can be dangerous. Workers in laundries, steel mills, foundries, bakeries and construction face conditions that make them especially vulnerable to safety and health hazards related to heat at all times of the year. But summer's higher temperatures increase those risks. Simple precautions can prevent many heat-related deaths and injuries.

"This is one area where education and training can really save lives," says Commissioner of Labor Nancy J. Guyott. "Hoosier employers and workers need to know how to prevent heat-related illnesses and how to recognize early signs of heat stress. Prevention is the best cure."

The combination of heat, humidity and physical labor can lead to fatalities. Each year, many workers die and thousands suffer heat-related occupational injuries and illnesses serious enough to miss work. Additional illnesses may be under-reported if workers and employers are not familiar with the warning signs.

The two most serious forms of heat related illnesses are heat exhaustion (primarily from dehydration) and heat stroke, which can be fatal. Signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke need immediate attention. Recognizing those signs – dizziness, nausea, weakness, dry,

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pale skin or hot red skin, seizures, mood changes – and taking quick action can make a difference in preventing a fatality.

Federal OSHA prints Heat Stress Cards, which list tips and precautions that can prevent many heat-related deaths and injuries. Available in English and Spanish, this laminated fold-up card is free to Indiana employers to distribute to their workers. For copies, call OSHA Publications (202) 693-1888 or write to: U.S. Department of Labor/OSHA, OSHA Publications, P.O. Box 37535, Washington, D.C. 20013-7535.

How to Protect Workers

- Train all workers to recognize and treat the signs of heat stress. Be sure all workers know who has been trained to provide first aid. Also train supervisors to detect early signs of heat-related illness and permit workers to interrupt their work if they become extremely uncomfortable.
 - Consider a worker's physical condition when determining fitness to work in hot environments. Taking certain medications, lack of conditioning, obesity, pregnancy, and inadequate rest can increase susceptibility to heat stress.
 - Work in pairs – use the buddy system. They can keep an eye on each other.
 - Help workers adjust to the heat by assigning a lighter work load and longer rest periods for the first 5 to 7 days of intense heat. This process needs to start all over again when a worker returns from vacation or any absence from the job or after a cooler spell.
 - Encourage workers to drink plenty of water – about 1 cup of cool water every 15 to 20 minutes, even if they are not thirsty, and to avoid alcohol, coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks that dehydrate the body.
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- Encourage workers to wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. Workers should change their clothes if they get completely saturated.
- Use general ventilation and spot cooling at points of high heat production. Good airflow increases evaporation and cooling of the skin.
- Alternate work and rest periods, with rest periods in a cooler area. Shorter, more frequent work-rest periods are best. Schedule heavy work for cooler times of the day and use appropriate protective clothing.
- Monitor temperatures, humidity, and workers' responses to heat at least hourly.

More information about heat hazards can be found at www.in.gov/labor.
